

Klamath Falls: The Conduct of Federal Officials in Question

Report by J.J. Johnson 06.17.01

Regrettably, this will be not the report that many expect. My mission was to cover what was expected to be the largest remote Congressional Hearing ever. As a reporter, I have taken a pledge of reporting a story rather than being the story. But on June 16, 2001 to one or several law enforcement officials, **I** became the story of Klamath Falls.

Note: This is an important lesson for conservative lawmakers. To those elected republicans in office, a complete reading is suggested.

On Thursday, June 14, 2001, numerous calls led me to Oregon Republican Congressman Greg Walden' Press Secretary, Jeff Eager. I inquired as to what procedures journalists would have to go through to be in good position to cover the hearings.

On Friday, June 15, 2001, I received an early morning return call from Mr. Eager stating that, "none would be needed, show up with the press."

And so I did.

Saturday, June 16, 2001

Having received word that the 6 congressmen would entertain a press conference for the media at 8:30 am, I arrived on the scene with camera in hand to take still photos of the pre-hearing rally, which took place outside the Klamath Falls Event Center at the fairgrounds. I first took one high photo of the outside crowd, and then got in close (with the other media) to catch Congressman Walden addressing the crowd, with 250,000 lbs. of donated foods from several large grocery store chains.

Yes, the people (farmers and ranchers) are hurting out here. Some even say - starving. That's why I'm here covering this story.

Second Photo; Welcome to Rural America



**With Congressmen announcing emergency food handouts
- to FARMERS AND RANCHERS
- due to a federally created disaster**

It was after the second photo where I unfortunately began to become part of this story.

I was approached by a man who later identified himself as officer Rick Daniel (I can only assume that was his name). He wore plain clothes, and the earpiece that had become an all-too-common sight during my presence at this event. He requested that he be allowed to search the two pouches that I was wearing. I agreed. One pouch carried my cell phone and other accessories. The other carried the digital camera. Officer Daniel's words: "We just want to be extra safe."

Officer Daniel later identified himself as working with local (Klamath Falls) police.

I did, however, look around to see if anyone else had been stopped and searched (to be 'extra safe', of course), especially with many other folks having many more pockets, etc. - all within the media pool. I noticed no one else being searched.

After the Congressmen were done addressing the crowd, I called out Jeff Eager's name. He responded. I asked where the press conference with the Congressmen would be held. He directed all the media (upon my question) to another area outside, where several reporters and myself began asking questions. Some of those reporters even knew who I was.

My goal was not to ask the typical state-sponsored media question of "What do you think will come out of these hearings?" I calculated that would be a moot point, since no Democrat from this Congressional Subcommittee bothered to attend this event. I decided to take the purely political angle. My first question was directed to Congressman Walden from about 4 feet away:

"Most of the people out here voted republican. The 2002 mid-term elections are coming up. Do you feel inaction by the White House and republican leadership will affect the voters in the area?" I also asked if he felt this was a "bipartisan issue?"

The answers will come later. What's important is to know what kinds of questions I was asking and that I was only 4 feet away. My next question was directed at my representative (again for the law enforcement officials reading this - MY OWN Congressional representative) Jim Gibbons (R-NV).

"Is there any action George Bush can take to reverse what has happened here?"

Among his answers was the following statement:

"If Bush were to take action, the major media would be all over him."

Gibbons made several statements, but I listed this particular statement for a reason that will be explained later. I talked to Gibbons (again - MY OWN representative) from about 3 feet away. I had the answers I needed for the report - so far.

I should stop here and state that the remainder of this article may deeply disturb the good people of Klamath Falls, Oregon and surrounding areas. This is not the intention. I can say that I was treated with no ill will from those folks. In fact many of them knew of Sierra Times.com, greeted me pleasantly, and remembered me from the [Bucket Brigade on May 7, 2001](#). I wasn't hard to spot. Of the estimated 2500 persons in attendance (estimate from Klamath County Capt. Pits), I counted only three Blacks including myself... and I was the only one NOT wearing a Capital Police earpiece.

Yes, this was my second trip to Klamath Falls, where local law enforcement knew of my presence before. I stood in a lake to photograph Senators and Congressman taking water from the Reservoir. I got close and took photos of public officials speaking. I took photos of elected representatives pouring water in the nearly dry irrigation canal that has bankrupted so many due to federal policies. To the best of my knowledge, Sierra Times.com was the first Internet publication to promote the bucket brigade. Sierra Times.com was the first Internet news publication with a report of the [Klamath Falls Bucket Brigade](#). I was present at the Congressional hearings regarding Jarbidge Road in Elko Nevada. I was present and reported on the [Jarbidge Shovel Brigade](#), Range Net 2000, and other western oriented events. I am stating all of this as background information for the remainder of this story.

Once the preparations began for the hearing itself, I inquired where the press would be so I could get a good seat, photos of the seated crowd, and photos of the table where the Congressman would be taking testimony. Remember, this was already approved and granted by Jeff Eager, Rep. Walden's press secretary. I was directed to the press entrance, where I stated my request to the officer at the door. Before I could even get my identification from my pocket, I was told "I had to go in the front with everyone else."

From there, it was hard not to notice the virtual 'entourage' of clean cut folks wearing earpieces around me - everywhere I went. During my time of getting statements from folks in the area (who also noticed the heavy security presence), I overheard officers talking to others of concern about eco-terrorists. After recent reports about eco-terrorists, and their rise in activity out west, I completely understand this concern. But being a bit upset that my wife and I drove over 300 miles to cover this story (and we don't get paid for this, folks), I was justifiably upset with not being able to have the same access to information and material that other media was, for some reason, given access to with little question - even after I had INQUIRED about it via telephone.

I walked up to Officer Daniel again (I was told his name later), this time showing him my Nevada Driver's license unsolicited. I wanted to clear the air of any misconceptions. I made my objections known, not addressing the matter of being a "suspicious concern" of law enforcement for some unknown reason.

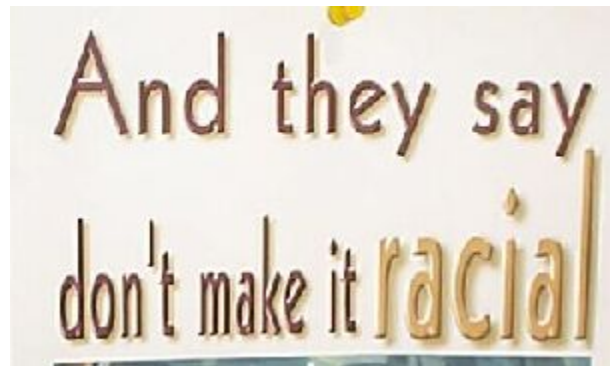
I had 'shadows' everywhere I went. And it was obvious.

Daniels assured me that I was not being "singled out", and that law enforcement was just being extra safe.

During the testimony, I had found a seat in the Event Center with my wife, and was listening to the testimony. One that caught my attention was the testimony of a High School Principal. As in Elko, I knew that opening statements of witnesses were pre-submitted to the Congressional Committee. Not wanting to misquote anyone, I walked up to a local officer who was at a ramp leading to the lower floor. I asked if Jeff Eager could be reached in order to get copies of the statements from those testifying.

This officer couldn't help me, but walking away, the 'tails' that were on me had become increasingly evident. Getting fed up with the whole matter, I walked over to a mural that was near the entrance to the area where the estimated 2500 were present. I took two photos, but one I took for a reason. Yes, I was attempting to send a clear signal to those who just wanted to be 'extra safe'. I was confident (and later proven correct) that my taking of this photo would get someone's attention.

After this photo was taken, upon walking outside to speak with friends at the event (at the request of law enforcement who asked everyone to take the back room chatter outside), I was officially greeted by Officer Daniels again. Here's where the confrontation began.



This time, he asked to see my identification, noting that he "didn't write it down when I gave it to him". He also informed me that I was attempting to be on the floor area and that I couldn't do that. I told him that I was more than happy to provide identification after I respectfully and humbly gave him (and the others listen via his comm equipment) a piece of my mind. What did I tell him? Basically everything you read above - noting that I was ONLY trying to get copies of the testimony for my report.

Daniels suggested I have them faxed to me and thought that my going out to the farm areas and talking to local residents affected by this FEDERAL ACTION would be a good idea. Here' the most important point to my Conversation with Officer Daniels: **He acknowledged that he recognized me from the Bucket Brigade on May 7, 2001. Several witnesses heard this.**

And remember: According to Officer Daniels, I should have the information FAXED to me.

I then gave him my identification (Note: I didn't have to), to which he jotted down virtually every detail from my Nevada Driver's License.

Interviews were done with local residents on the scene, who were more than willing to talk to any press willing to listen. I am one of those people. But the boiling point came when Liz Bowen from the Pioneer Press (who sent an e-mail to this office offering assistance before this event), made my wife and myself aware that merely showing her **business card** allowed her into an area that I was forbidden to enter (Remember, even with prior approval from the Congressman's press secretary). In addition, we learned that Barry Clousen, who had a CHP press pass, was also not allowed in that forbidden area. I mention Clousen for two reasons: 1) He is a Caucasian. 2) Clousen has written a book exposing the environmental movement, and has testified before Congress about the dangers of eco-terrorists. Again, for some reason, he felt he was ALSO under suspicion.

Enter Nancy Johnson: As General Counsel of Sierra Times.com, she went to the 'officers at the gate' inquiring to see Mr. Eager about the documents I had requested and to be allowed to be where the press pool was sitting to actually hear the testimony from both sides, followed by questions and answers. I was then summoned to return to the gated area by Nancy where, apparently, the matter had been resolved. I then told Mr. Eager about our

phone call and what I was requesting. We both acknowledged that a phone call had taken place between us.

Then almost magically, the pre-submitted testimony and the Congressman's press package appeared (not faxed) in my hands. Mr. Eager then asked the plain clothes' Capitol police officer (wearing the earpiece, of course) for their permission for me to be seated in the press corps area to cover the story.

Permission denied - without reason.

To be exact: "Do you have a problem with this gentleman sitting with the press core?" the press secretary asked.

Answer: "Yes, we do." said Bob Chulz - the officer 'calling the shots'.

"Sorry, Mr. Johnson. My hands are tied, and they call the shots here," Eager said.

I immediately thanked Mr. Eager, backed away, and came back to write this report. And with that - my personal comments:

Despite the efforts of paranoid law enforcement, Sierra Times.com came here to get a report for its audience about a grave issue that it has been covering. We feel it irresponsible to our readers not to provide exclusive coverage of such an important event. They will see a report. But the statement of Representative Jim Gibbons (R-NV) needs to be addressed with republican lawmakers:

"If Bush were to take action, the major media would be all over him."

Message to the Republican (notably western) lawmakers: The media will be all over you if only the 'favored' media is allowed access. I doubt that if CNN - partially controlled by radical environmentalist Ted Turner - or the pro-green Portland Oregonian requested the same type of access, it would be questioned. And after that, the media would either "be all over you", take your words out of context, or simply not cover the issue at all. Western law makers then could say that the matter was "out of their hands" and law enforcement could gleefully say "we're just being extra safe."

I can say that when it comes to news coverage of events like these, Sierra Times.com is probably the Klamath Basin's best friend.

This is the real story of the Klamath Basin. Over 200,000 acres of land, and over 1400 farms are given the same treatment with water access that this reporter was given today with media access by federal officials, even after receiving prior guarantees: **Permission Denied.**

Coming up:
Klamath Falls: State Sponsored Eco-Terrorism

Permission to reprint/republish granted, as long as you include the name of our site, the author, and our URL.
www.SierraTimes.com

All Sierra Times news reports, and all editorials are © 2001 SierraTimes.com (unless otherwise noted)